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CHALLENGE

FIGHT FOR COMMUNISM ★ LUCHE POR EL COMUNISMO ★ PLP

THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST NEWSPAPER OF PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY

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SMASH RACISM, BUILD WORKERS' POWER

LOS ANGELES, CA, March 17—"We are going to turn our pain into power" shouted one of the daughters of Marco Vasquez Jr.

This impassioned sentiment was met with cheers and raised fists from about 100 protest supporters. As the struggle against police murder moves forward in Los Angeles, more and more people, especially the families who are closest to this form of racist oppression, recognize the need for systemic change. Through being immersed in the class struggle and intertwining our lives with our base, members of Progressive Labor Party (PLP) are showing that communism is the only system that will meet those aspirations for workers' power and PLP is the vehicle to achieve it.

We spent back-to-back weekends saying the names of those killed by police. On February 26 and 27, we focused on the family of Cesar Rodriguez. On August 29, 2017, he was thrown in front of an oncoming train by Long Beach PD for allegedly not paying $1.75 for the train fare. His family has set up multiple altars for Cesar at the Wardlow Station only to have them removed, probably by police, in less than a day. So we hosted a 24 hour vigil to ensure some remained for at least one full day.

Volunteers brought food and snacks. Many committed to spending the night at the train station to keep watch. As families gathered around the fire pit, we were able to deepen our ties with each other. One of the most empowering aspects of this long term struggle has been how committed the families are to fighting together.

They also deeply value the commitment members of PLP have shown to this fight. A common remark is that although they have lost one family member, they have gained so many more.

On March 6, we took the fight to Whittier, CA. About 100 protesters took over the streets, marching from the home where Marco Vasquez Jr. was murdered in front of his entire family to the Sheriff's station where the KKKops hideout. The families of seven different people murdered by the police were present along with a couple of other organizations.

The line of PLP shined through with the chants we led, the dozens of CHALLENGEs we distributed, and the conversations we had with families and friends throughout the event.

Outside of attending regular protests against police terror, we have made a conscious effort to integrate these families into our lives. We speak daily with multiple families even if it's just to check in or share a quick joke. We celebrate birthdays and other momentous events together. If someone is looking for housing or needs help finding a vaccine, the whole committee is ready to support.

This base of struggle and support gives a glimpse of the communist future we know we will someday win.

We have built trust with these families and oth-

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OUR FIGHT

☆Progressive Labor Party (PLP) fights to destroy capitalism and the dictatorship of the capitalist class. We organize workers, soldiers and youth into a revolutionary movement for communism.

☆The dictatorship of the working class — communism—can provide a lasting solution to the disaster that is today's world for billions of people. This cannot be done through electoral politics, but requires a revolutionary movement and a mass Red Army led by PLP.

☆Worldwide capitalism, in its relentless drive for profit, inevitably leads to war, fascism, poverty, disease, starvation and environmental destruction. The capitalist class, through its state power — governments, armies, police, schools and culture — maintains a dictatorship over the world's workers. The capitalist dictatorship supports, and is supported by, the anti-working-class ideologies of racism, sexism, nationalism, individualism and religion.

☆While the bosses and their mouthpieces claim "communism is dead," capitalism is the real failure for billions worldwide. Capitalism returned to Russia and China because socialism retained many aspects of the profit system, like wages and privileges. Russia and China did not establish communism.

☆Communism means working collectively to build a worker-run society. We will abolish work for wages, money and profits. While capitalism needs unemployment, communism needs everyone to contribute and share in society's benefits and burdens.

☆Communism means abolishing racism and the concept of "race." Capitalism uses racism to super-exploit Black, Latin, Asian and indigenous workers, and to divide the entire working class.

☆Communism means abolishing the special oppression of women— sexism—and divisive gender roles created by the class society.

☆Communism means abolishing nations and nationalism. One international working class, one world, one Party.

☆Communism means that the minds of millions of workers must become free from religion's false promises, unscientific thinking and poisonous ideology. Communism will triumph when the masses of workers can use the science of dialectical materialism to understand, analyze and change the world to meet their needs and aspirations.

☆Communism means the Party leads every aspect of society. For this to work, millions of workers — eventually everyone — must become communist organizers. Join Us!

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WHO WRITES FOR CHALLENGE?

CHALLENGE is for the working class, produced by the working class. The fact that CHALLENGE/PLP articles are not signed grows from PLP's criticism of the cult of the individual in the former socialist Soviet Union and China. We do not want to encourage the possibility of building up a "following" around any particular individual.

While an article may be written by one person, the final version is based on collective discussion and criticism. Many times this collective discussion even precedes an individual's writing of an article.

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Editorial

Stimulus package: Crumbs on the road to war and fascism

The $1.9 trillion "America Rescue Plan" from Jim Crow Joe Biden, rammed through a Democrat-controlled Congress, is an act of desperation by the U.S. finance capital bosses. As they move toward more open fascism and global war, these liberal rulers need to build loyalty among workers devastated by Covid-19, mass unemployment, and the basic contradictions of the profit system.

The finance capitalists—the Big Fascists who have mostly run the U.S. and dominated the globe since World War II—are now threatened on all sides. They're losing geopolitical ground by the day to China, their chief inter-imperialist rival. Their own Capitol was besieged by armed militias loyal to the openly racist Small Fascists, the isolationist wing led by the Koch and Mercer and DeVos families, among others. (See glossary on p. 5.) Meanwhile, tens of millions of workers have lost confidence in a system that can't provide decent-paying jobs, basic healthcare in a pandemic, or enough reliable energy to keep their children from freezing to death in a winter storm (see CHALLENGE, 3/17).

As the U.S. economy stalls with a "real" unemployment rate of more than 11 percent (thebalance.com, 3/6), the bosses must figure out a way to give it a shot to the heart to get things back up and running. And as they continue down an inevitable collision course toward world war, they must build fascism at home. The crumbs in Biden's stimulus package point to continuing crises in the present and to horrific carnage in the not-so-distant future. That is why Progressive Labor Party and the international working class must organize to smash the bosses and seize state power with communist revolution.

Capitalist criminal neglect

Millions of jobs have been lost in the pandemic. Many will never be recovered. Due to capitalism's racist inequalities, Black and Latin workers have been hit hardest. Black women workers, in particular, have been devastated by a perfect storm of layoffs, shuttered schools, and added childcare responsibilities (Wall Street Journal, 3/6).

The Biden-Kamala Harris administration claims that the newly enacted tax credits will cut child poverty by 50 percent. Yet adjusted for inflation, the additional income is less than half what poor families received in the 1970s through the miserly Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. That was before Democrats like Bill Clinton and Biden took an ax to it in the name of welfare reform (CNBC, 3/11).

In a nation with more than 10 million poor children (Pew Research Center, 11/20/20), a 50 percent reduction would leave 5 million of them impoverished—an atrocity. Biden's crumbs, touted as "transformational" by cheerleader sellouts like the New York Times' Michelle Goldberg and Paul Krugman, is a woefully inadequate response to the nightmares children face under this brutal system: hunger, homelessness, lack of healthcare and childcare, racist miseducation, abuse, neglect, incarceration, and police terror. Communism will mean an end to this litany of capitalist horrors inflicted on the most vulnerable!

Another pathetic relief measure under the Stimulus Crumbs law is the expansion of unemployment benefits. In the first stimulus last spring, the bosses doled out an extra $600 a week for unemployed workers. This time around, the U.S. Senate cut the added benefit to $300 a week. They caved to West Virginia Democrat Joe Manchin, who takes money hand over fist from the oil and coal bosses. That didn't stop him from making the racist argument that $400 would be a "disincentive" to workers looking for jobs (Newsweek, 3/5).

To add injury to insult, a $15 minimum wage was stripped out of the law. The splits among the capitalist rulers—both between the Big and Small Fascists and within the finance capital camp—left them unable to raise the minimum wage beyond the current $7.25 an hour. That's well under the poverty level for a single parent with only one child, even if that parent works full time (City Watch, 6/20).

Bosses will kill millions to save capitali$m

During this profound crisis of global capitalism, a similar period offers some lessons: the Great Depression of the 1930s. Then as now, the U.S. bosses faced growing threats, from Europe to the Pacific. Inspired by the worker-run Soviet Union, which had no unemployment, U.S. workers were much more militant. In 1934 alone, there were more than 2,000 strikes. Then as now, the bosses turned to a reboot to save U.S. capitalism: the New Deal, which created more than 12 million jobs through the Work Progress Administration and the Public Works Administration (Foreign Affairs, Jan/Feb).

But like all programs under capitalism, the New Deal was riddled with racist inequality. New programs like Social Security excluded domestic and farm workers, a huge section of the Black and Latin working class—just as Biden's America Rescue Plan excludes undocumented workers.

The more farsighted Big Fascists know that a limited and temporary relief plan won't be enough to build the patriotic movement they need for World War III. Now they're promising an infrastructure bill and climate legislation--to create more jobs, and to help them prepare for war. What remains to be seen is whether the Biden-led bosses can summon the unity and discipline they need to pay for all these programs by raising taxes on their own class (CNBC, 3/10).

The main lesson, though, is that the New Deal, a far more significant restructuring of U.S. capitalism, couldn't end the Depression. That required World War II and the destruction of the productive capacities of many of the major industrial powers. The carnage cost 100 million workers their lives. The bosses know that war is the only way to address the contradictions of their system.

Communism: the real rescue plan

We have seen glimpses of a communist future in the many mutual aid efforts since the beginning of the pandemic. Workers have answered the call by donating funds, distributing food, and defending families faced with eviction. These are the previews of a communist world based on the principle: "to each according to need, from each according to commitment." Under communism there will be no poverty, unemployment, or imperialist war. Only a communist revolution under the banner of Progressive Labor Party can create the society the working class deserves. Join us! ✪

Road to revolution

West Wednesday unites families terrorized by kkkops

FACEBOOK: JUSTICE FOR TYRONE WEST
PROGRESSIVE LABOR PARTY SAYS
JUSTICE FOR TYRONE WEST
PUT KILLER COPS IN CELL BLOCKS
SMASH RACISM & CAPITALISM

BALTIMORE, March 6—Two days before the trial of Derek Chavin for robbing the life of George Floyd, antiracists and six families whose loved ones were murdered by the kkkops here rallied to denounce capitalist state terrorism. The West Coalition, with Progressive Labor Party (PLP), organized a demonstration for the prosecution of killer-kkkop Derek Chauvin, the reopening of all local cases of murder-by-police, and the jailing of those cops too! As the masses here fight racist police terror and demand more accountability, it's becoming more common to hear—even if the speaker is not a member of PLP—that communist revolution is the only solution!

...They are killing us'

Since the murder of Tyrone West in July 2013, antiracists protested in what became the West Wednesday rallies every week, which since the pandemic have been live-streamed to between 150 and 600 viewers. In fact, the 400th protest will be held as this issue of CHALLENGE goes to press.

Today, about 20 cars, decorated with antiracist posters, caravanned down Greenmount Avenue for two-and-a-half miles. Lyrics of our throbbing music trumpeted the need to stand up against racist police.

The whole way, Tawanda Jones, sister of Tyrone, stood up through the car's moonroof. Her fist was in the air, inspiring enthusiastic onlookers on the sidewalks.

Arriving at City Hall for a high energy, two-hour rally, joining the West family were women and men, representing five more families, each of whom had a loved one murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in blue.

"I imagine what my brother was screaming," sister Tawanda Jones grieved, referring to when her brother Tyrone West was repeatedly tased, maced, and beaten to death by 11 to 15 cops.

She went on to say, about the early days of the struggle for accountability, "Everyone thought my family was crazy. Now you see! They are killing us!"

'They brought the war to me'

Jarrel Gray's uncle performed a spoken-word poem, condemning the criminal in-justice system, in which he tells of his nephew's death, caused by the electric noose of 50,000 volts from repeated tasings.

Many reformers tout tasers as a reasonable weapon for law enforcement. However, we know that more than 1,000 people in the U.S. have died, during the last two decades, after police shocked them with tasers. The stun gun was ruled to be a cause, or contributing factor, in 153 of those deaths. Nine in ten who died after being tased were unarmed (Reuters).

Leonard Shand's sister, Tracy, boldly condemned the imperialist roots of U.S. history. Then, Nicole Pettiford spoke. Her family was doubly terrorized, having her father-in-law, Anthony Anderson, and 16-year-old-daughter fall to police and police-instigated violence. In response to cop killings, committed with no consequences, she warned, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander!"

Now raising their four children on her own, Marah O'Neal spoke about the horrendous police killing of her former husband, Jamaal Taylor. She explained, "They brought the war to me. They're going to stop killing our Black men… our children… our Black women… our Latino people… our white people too. Trust and believe they're going to get this work. It's all of us versus them!"

...We need a revolution'

A speaker for Progressive Labor Party unwaveringly declared, "We need a revolution. We need to destroy this capitalist system, and create a brotherly and sisterly world of equality," a point greeted with enthusiastic cheers, though of course not from everyone.

The Party speaker also explained that fellow workers on the job taught him how racism really works: "It's a trick by the capitalist class to divide and conquer the working class."

During applause in response, another speaker shouted out, "Say it again!"

The multiracial crowd of about 50 hissed at the mention of Maryland's Law Enforcement Officer's Bill of (Killer) Rights, and roared "Shame!" at cops nearby when they were pointed out.

Antiracist learn from LA struggle

Leading up to this event, ever since November of 2018, Progressive Labor Party has led a late-evening CHALLENGE discussion group, once a month, for interested antiracist in the West Wednesday struggle. The affectionate name for this gathering is C-DAWWG, meaning CHALLENGE Discussion After West Wednesday Group. In those sessions, we recently completed the third and final discussion about lessons to be learned from a great report by comrades in Los Angeles (see struggle, page 1).

It tells the exciting story of their bold organizing work: in the fight against police brutality, against evictions, to widely share the important understanding that communism is the only solution, and to recruit new members, thereby expanding the strength of PLP. As communists do, the LA comrades also honestly discussed strengths and weaknesses in their work, and we learned from that too.

Antiracist struggle bears communist fruit

PLP here also recently launched a new study group for folks who are seriously thinking about joining PLP. Our expectation is that this new collective will likely morph into a Party club, which is the basic local organizational unit of Progressive Labor Party.

At this caravan and rally, however, no CHALLENGE newspapers could be distributed, because they were already gone, having all been taken by participants at the rally in Annapolis, two days earlier. We will increase our numbers.

So even if Chauvin's trial leads to a cellblock, tiny specks of justice will not easily quench the flame towards greater action.

The victory here is antiracist fighters seeing the need and having the commitment to begin the long fight towards building a new society without racist police terror. That system is communism. By growing the Party in numbers and strength, communist influence and leadership can reach more of the working class until one day we are powerful enough to seize state power with communist revolution.✪

Education

Plant seeds of struggle, grow communism

CHICAGO, March 13 – A multiracial group of nearly a dozen workers met in a community garden today to create plans to fight the risks posed by both the pandemic and the racist bosses.

The garden is located across the street from a public school that serves mainly Latin working-class families. Members from the communist Progressive Labor Party (PLP) have worked for years to build relationships with parents and students from this neighborhood.

Collectively, we have helped build the fight for better learning conditions and more resources for the Black and Latin working-class youth who are attacked hardest under capitalism. Most recently, we were active in the fight to force Mayor Lori Lightfoot and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to push back school reopenings until more worker and student safety concerns could be met (See CHALLENGE, 2/17 and 3/3).

More students and education workers have started to filter back into the schools. But that hasn't prevented us from fighting for our collective interests and safety. On the heels of the liberal bosses passing out the crumbs for economic "relief" (see editorial on page 2), it's essential that we fight now for that money to be spent to benefit workers and students and not to line the pockets of the parasitic capitalists.

Ultimately, it is only a worker-run, communist society that can guarantee that essentials like education, housing, and medicine can be freely and equitably available to everyone in our class. PLP is committed to build this fight as we continue building our international Party for communist revolution and the destruction of capitalism.

Organize! Expand the struggle

Our group assembled in the garden by late morning. Over donated food and water, each worker shared out some of their experiences navigating the recent challenges of pandemic capitalism.

Many shared their frustrations with the bosses' racist and bungled vaccine rollout, which turns an essential public health need into a lottery that excludes many Black, elderly, and undocumented workers. Others highlighted their anger about spotty internet access and inferior rental laptops during remote learning sessions. Still others pointed out the school lacks both clean drinking water and a library.

PLP members consistently put forward communist politics and multiracial working-class unity as the way to fight back against the bosses' disregard for working-class life that we experience. Everyone present agreed that the struggle would only be able to move forward with increased commitment from parents to pressure CPS.

To this end, we made a plan to meet more consistently among ourselves to build our struggle. We made a list of ten demands to bring to the next local school council meeting, including opening the schools up as vaccination spaces for education workers and community members, economic aid for working-class families, and improving ventilation and pipes in the building.

Liberal bosses are the main danger

As part of U.S. President Joe Biden's new economic stimulus, CPS is set to receive $1.8 billion, which breaks down to about $5,200 additional spending per student in Chicago (Chalkbeat, 3/10). Without workers organizing around demands such as ours, many correctly recognize that the bosses could just as easily hand most of that money over to cover the district's debt with the bloodsucking bankers. Already, CPS's credit rating got a small boost as a result of the bill passing (Crain's, 3/11).

Many of the city's liberal politicians like to point the finger at the banks for the debt crisis, conveniently forgetting that many of them have clear connections to finance capitalism. The slick liberal bosses in major U.S. cities like Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, who like to cry crocodile tears over the racial educational gaps present under the profit system, are the very ones that have closed down schools in Black and Latin neighborhoods and made students walk through metal detectors for decades. That's why in PLP we call these Big Fascist bosses the larger threat to the working class.

These Big Fascists are desperate to get students back into classrooms as part of their push to indoctrinate young minds with capitalist ideas to try and prepare them for more discipline and eventually imperialist war. Any plans from the bosses to "educate" working-class youth are a disaster for workers. Nothing short of international communist revolution led by a mass PLP will transform education from an ideologically toxic commodity into a liberating force in the service of the working class.

The Party is the weapon

Working-class organizing from the ground up—like our work here—is an inspiring development. We are committed to continue struggling alongside our fellow workers to insist that our collective demands are met.

Creating a culture of solidarity and struggle can arm our class with the skills and confidence that workers can and will run society, without racism, sexism, or profits. PLP is the weapon to win the egalitarian communist world we need. Join us!✪

SMASH RACISM, BUILD WORKERS' POWER

The working class can and must eradicare the virus of capitalism with communist revolution.

Continued from page 1

er "regulars" at the protests over time. It is clear to all that PLP plays a vastly different role than other organizations entrenched in anti-police brutality work. While many groups put families of victims on a platform to "tell their story", it is simply to boost credibility and visibility of their organization. PLP on the other hand, views these families as leaders in this struggle and prioritizes their political development and education.

Killer viruses mean we got fight back

Some family members have also been integrated into some of the healthcare fights in LA. Last month, members of four families joined a healthcare mass organization in protesting the closing of Olympia Hospital that has been critical in treating the mostly Black, Latin and immigrant working-class folks impacted by Covid-19.

These families along with our political leadership made the connection to 65 healthcare workers how racist police terrorize our communities just like this virus does. One chant was, "Killer cops mean" and "Killer viruses mean," "We got to fight back!"

PLP has long held the line that the most oppressed sections of the working class, particularly Black workers, are key to revolution. We are putting that line into practice in Los Angeles and learning a ton along the way.

Our next step is encouraging more family members to join our study group. One young Latin woman in particular is especially hungry to understand "the system" we talk so frequently about. She wants to change it. As we continue to spread the fight for communism, one thing is certain, these fiery families will be leading the way!✪

For Juston & Terrence, kill kkkapitalism

BOSTON, MA, February 6— Some 65 people demonstrated at the State House in Boston to demand, "Reopen the Juston Root case, appoint an independent investigator!". One year after cops killed Juston in cold blood, no cops have been prosecuted. That's capitalism, a racist system where the cops protect the billionaire ruling class and intimidate and divide the working class. The Progressive Labor Party (PLP) says we need a whole different system where workers run everything - that's communism.

Family members of Juston and of Terence Coleman, another victim of police murder, spoke. They delivered a petition of 11,500 signatures to the Massachusetts Attorney General's office, demanding the case be reopened. Juston's sister said that if this could happen to her brother, it could happen to anyone. No one of us is safe from police violence, until this racist, sexist, profiteering system is totally eliminated. Let working people run everything..

On February 7, 2020, Juston Root, during a mental health crisis, was at Brigham & Women's Hospital to meet a mental health therapist. A hospital security guard called the Boston cops on Juston, and they shot him once. Juston, bleeding, trying to escape, jumped in his car and drove down Route 9 towards a shopping center in Brookline, where he crashed his car and fell on the ground. Six cops followed. As Juston lay bleeding, they drove away an EMT trying to help him, kicked him, and then fired 31 bullets into Juston, killing him.

Racism hurts all workers

Juston, who was white, was a victim of a racist police murder. Why do we say it was racist? The disproportionate targeting of Black and Latin communities for heavy policing continues to provide the excuse for militarizing the police and shielding them with legal protections. This then, also endangers white workers. The life of a beautiful young man was worth nothing to these racist killer cops. After the killing, one of the cops was heard to say, "I killed that [epithet]!"

On March 6, PLP members joined another demonstration called by Mass Action Against Police Brutality to demand that kKiller cop Derek Chauvin be convicted of murder, and to reopen all the cases of police murder in Boston. The families of Burrell Ramsey-White, Ross Batista, Juston Root, and Terrence Coleman, both Black and white, spoke at the rally demanding that their loved one's cases be reopened.

The PLP leaflet and CHALLENGE newspaper, promoting multi-racial unity, and our revolutionary communist signs were warmly received. The divisive poison of identity politics was noticeably absent. We will try to work more closely with this organization and the victims' families. We will help fight against these racist cop murders now, as we fight for a future where racism and all capitalist exploitation is ended once and for all. That's communism!

Racism hurts everyone in the working class. We need to unite to fight to destroy this stinking capitalist system of exploitation and oppression and fascist police murderers!✪

Antisexist struggle
Nurses strike for patient safety!

WORCESTER, MA, March 16— St Vincent's Hospital workers are on strike for safe patient staffing. The hospital is owned by Tenet Healthcare, which made $478 million in the last quarter alone. PLP is supporting this strike. The nurses won't give up!

Capitalism means understaffing, cutbacks and systemic, racist, sexist healthcare! Whenever there is a scarcity of a commodity under capitalism (e.g. healthcare, covid vaccines), racism, sexism, and poverty determines who gets left behind.

As long as we have this profit system, human life will be cheap and we will continue to be commodities, tossed aside and discarded when no longer useful to the bosses. Support the striking nurses as they fight for safe patient ratios and their livelihood!

Only a multiracial, antiracist workforce that fights racism and is grounded in the old communist adage: "an injury to one is an injury to all," can lead and fight for real change. Politicians can't do that. Union leaders can't do that. Only the working class with communist leadership can achieve a need-based system because we are the cure. Full story next issue!

Glossary
communist political terms

Fascism

Capitalism's response to a crisis of their system, when the bosses can no longer sustain the charade of liberal democracy and resort to more direct control and state terror instead. Fascism is marked by the ruling capitalists disciplining their own ranks to serve the urgent needs of the capitalist state and weather the crisis. To defend their system from internal and external threats, they use all the means available in their state apparatus, including violence. To build unity within their class and loyalty from workers, they rely on nationalist politics and calls for sacrifice. Their strategy is to mislead the working class to kill our working class sisters and brothers in the next inter-imperialist war.

Big Fascists

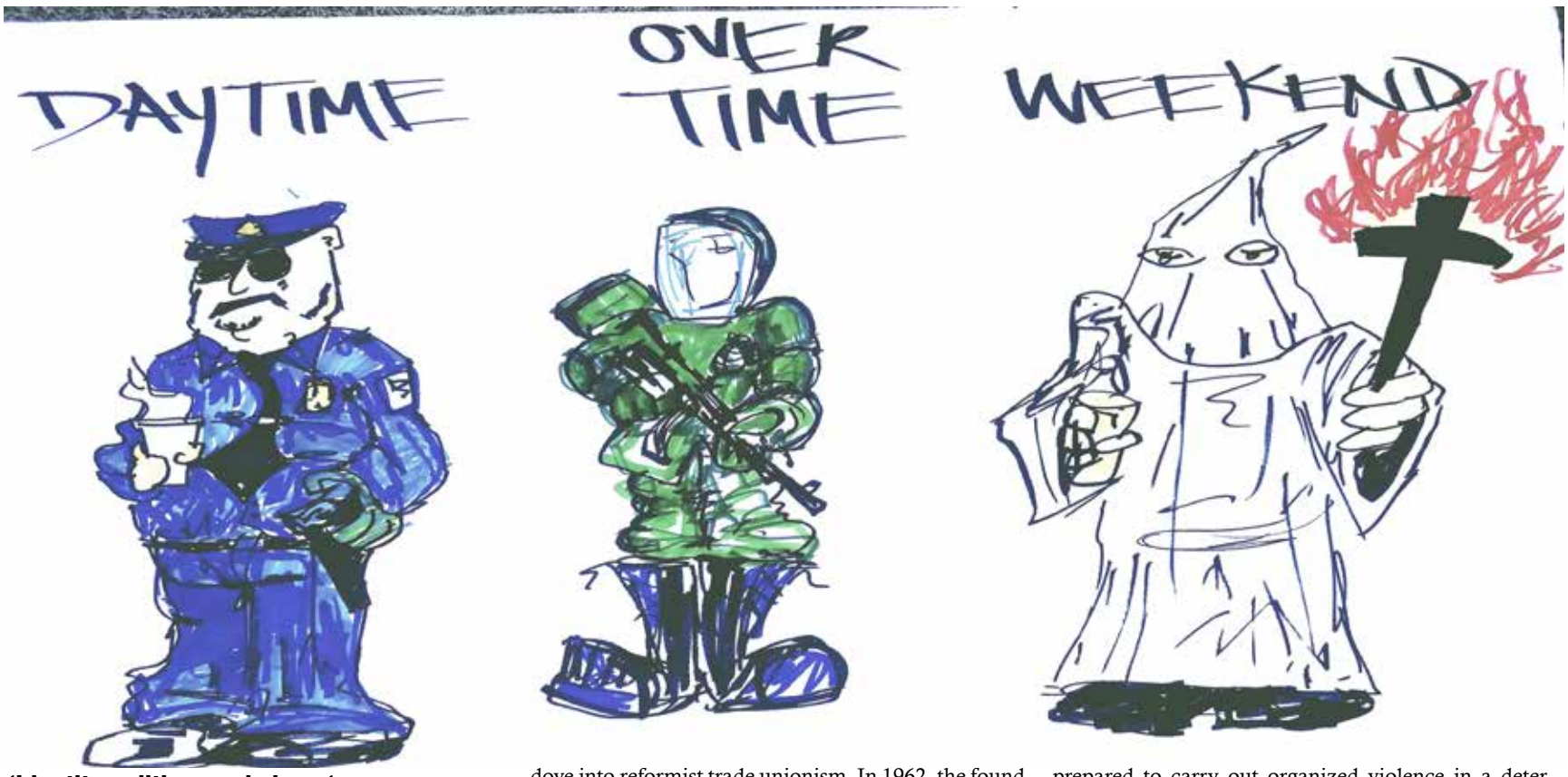
The Big Fascists are the dominant finance capitalist faction of the U.S. ruling class. They represent the wealthiest and most powerful bosses in the U.S., including multinational banks like Chase and Citibank, multinational oil companies like ExxonMobil, the big automakers, Boeing, Amazon, and the major media companies. As the dominant grouping since World War II, the Big Fascists were the architects of the liberal world order with the U.S. bosses on top. Their dominance rests on U.S. financial and military power and its strategic control of the Middle East and the flow of oil to Europe, Asia, and Africa. To sustain this dominance, they need to rebuild a huge, multiracial military for inter-imperialist war, most likely with China.

Small Fascists

The Small Fascists are a group of domestically oriented U.S. capitalists who are challenging the Big Fascists over the direction of U.S. imperialism. Since their interests are less tied to controlling the flow of oil, they are against heavy taxation to keep troops in the Middle East and in general oppose costly military bases and invasions. They're willing to rely on a smaller, whiter army, backed by nuclear weapons and the Air Force. They have used open racism to build a political following.

LETTERS

We encourage all CHALLENGE readers to send in letters and articles about their experiences fighting the bosses worldwide.



'Identity politics workshop: 'very enlightening'

I have been interested in learning more about Progressive Labor Party and had heard from my friend that her sister is involved in a communist discussion group. I contacted her sister and she informed me of an education workshop that was taking place over zoom about communism in the classroom. I was intrigued, and decided to attend. I also just want to state that I am a queer, white woman and a recent STEM college graduate. Around 55 people attended the forum, which was surprising to me. An opening speech was given about how, through communism,U.S. workers can defeat capitalism and the negative effects (racism, sexism, etc.) it has on our society. I ended up attending one workshop about identity politics. It was very enlightening because I honestly wasn't too familiar with identity politics before this. I consider myself a huge feminist and am part of the LGBTQ+ community.

It was interesting to learn that it's better not to identify with people who are similar to you in terms of race or gender or sexuality, but rather with class. I've always automatically aligned myself with people that are within those two categories I mentioned above. I was actually also surprised to hear that racism can affect everyone in the workforce who isn't on the top, not just nonwhite workers.

While I didn't actively participate in the forum because I felt I was too uneducated, I enjoyed listening to what people had to say and learned a lot. This event has inspired the activist within me and I want to push through my comfort zone to do more.

I want to take action and do my part to fight capitalism. Thank you for the educational forum!

★★★★★

Angela Davis, not a communist

The otherwise excellent article, "Only Communism Can Eradicate Sexism" (CHALLENGE, 3/17), was marred by some confusion over communist history and what it means to be a revolutionary.

Exhibit A: While Angela Davis was a longtime member and leader of the Communist Party USA, it would be incorrect to call her a "Black communist." In the 1930s, a time when workers still held state power in the Soviet Union, the CPUSA was part of the vanguard of the international revolutionary communist movement. The party had political weaknesses, notably in joining an anti-fascist "popular front" with liberal Democrats.

But as the Langston Hughes article in the same issue of CHALLENGE pointed out, the CPUSA took a leading role in the most militant working-class and anti-racist struggles of the day, including leading the defense of the Scottsboro Boys.

With the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, the Soviet Union accelerated its decay into state capitalism. Under the leadership of arch-revisionists (fake leftists) Earl Browder and then Gus Hall, the CPUSA followed the USSR's tragic lead, abandoned revolution, and dove into reformist trade unionism. In 1962, the founders of Progressive Labor Party (then the Progressive Labor Movement) were kicked out—a badge of honor. By 1980, when Angela Davis ran for U.S. vice president on the CPUSA ticket with Gus Hall, she'd become another sell-out, lesser-evil capitalist reformer, no more and no less.

In 2019, in a statement celebrating the 100th anniversary of the CPUSA, this self-proclaimed socialist feminist wrote: "At the very least we must defeat the Trump administration in 2020!" Davis openly backed Joe Biden, the chief architect of racist mass incarceration. She said the choice of Top Cop Kamala Harris as Biden's running mate made the ticket "more palatable"—a corrupt nod to reactionary, lesser-evil identity politics.

Davis was right about one thing, however. Biden and Harris are indeed "the very least" the working class could get.

★★★★★

Overcome liberal illusions

We must beware of liberal police reforms that might lull us into thinking the police state we live in can be reformed. Perhaps the biggest response – by liberal politicians – to our summer of sharp struggle, has been in Ithaca, New York. Mayor Myrick's new proposal would replace the city's existing police department with a "Department of Community Solutions and Public Safety." Some tasks that don't necessitate armed cops are slated to be turned over to unarmed "community solution workers" who will report to a civilian director of public safety, instead of a police chief. Perhaps that will save upstate capitalists some city payroll money.

However, armed "public safety workers" will also exist, as before. Undoubtedly, those cops will remain prepared to carry out organized violence in a determined effort to suppress any workers' strikes; suppress any large-scale, bold student protests fighting for progressive demands; and suppress any powerful movements which seriously challenge the racial inequities that lie at the heart of capitalism.

The capitalist rulers need racist police brutality, intimidation, and terror to maintain their power over us. The system works just like it has been developed to do. So instead of begging the rulers to change their ways, we must overthrow them.

To do this, we need to build a revolutionary, anti-racist, working class party that takes aim at the entire structure and system of capitalism. A broad movement led by such a party can make a revolution to replace the existing racist capitalist system with a communist system of working class equality, antisexism and anti-racism. Then we can creatively work to meet our class's needs rather than slaving to make big profits for capitalists. Overcoming liberal illusions about the capitalist system, by millions of workers and youth, can open the way for a better future!

★★★★★

Where are you, Joe?

I was listening to a talk show about jobless Washington hotel workers seeking help and not getting it from their union. At the beginning of the show the moderator called for comments from people, " with union experience like Joe" (I had been on the show a few times already). I called in to comment but was on hold. With five minutes to the program's end, the moderator said, "Joe, where are you? Are you out there?" and suddenly my phone was connected to the show.

With only a minute to go I said the problem was that the labor movement had become business unionism and labor leaders had become capitalists with six figure salaries. I said when communists were in the unions, the leaders received only the average pay of union workers and reluctant leaders were instantly replaced.

Later I tried to understand why the moderator had called on me and I recalled previous shows like one on union organizing where I said that before communists were barred from union leadership, there were lunchtime discussions on world events and local strikes that workers could join after work. On another show I related the recent New York City Teamsters strike to the 1964 Transit workers strike that won because bosses said, "You've got a gun to our heads" which revealed the power of a united working class.

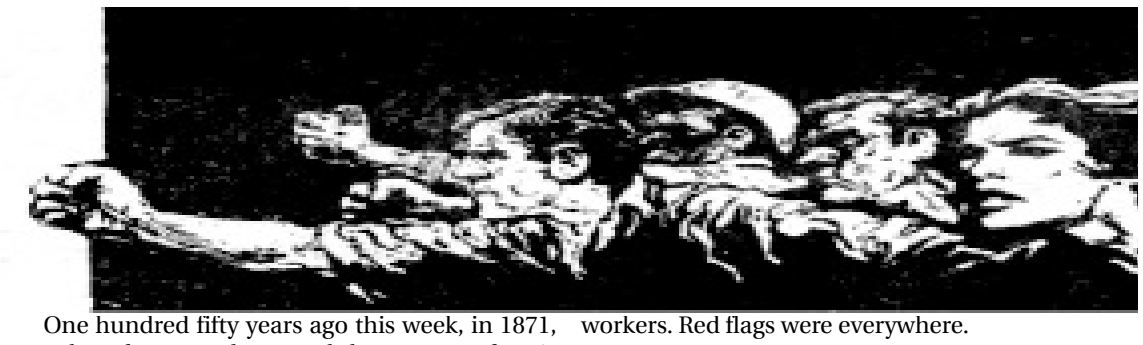
All these recollections made me realize that the moderator was calling for on the job, working-class tactics and strategies to fight capitalist oppression even when they are communist ideas.

Our Party needs to use every opportunity to relate our historical and current struggle experiences with workers to help them realize that communism is them running society in their interests.

★★★★★

150th Anniversary of the Paris Commune

The world's first workers' dictatorship



One hundred fifty years ago this week, in 1871, armed workers ran the French bosses out of Paris and established the Paris Commune. France was a world superpower. Germany had a growing industrial base and its own super-power ambitions. "We, the members of the International Working Men's Association, know of no frontiers," declared the communists. But competition between French and German capitalists led to war in 1870. The French army was soon routed.

The Parisian masses, though sympathetic to communism, were still swayed by nationalism. They demanded arms to defend the city from the besieging German army. The bourgeois government organized most adult males into its National Guard. However, these Guard units, made up of the working class, organized their own leadership committees in each district and a workers' Central Committee to unite them.

On March 17, 1871, the government gave in to the German army and fled to suburban Versailles. When troops returned the next day to fetch arms they had left behind, angry workers confronted them. The troops refused orders to shoot into the crowd. They handed their weapons to the workers.

The next day, March 18, 1871, the Central Committee of the National Guard took over City Hall and ran up the Red Flag of workers' revolution. For the first time in the history of class society, the working class had taken power.

Building equality

The Central Committee called for new elections. "The men who will serve you best are those whom you choose from amongst yourselves," it urged the workers. Red flags were everywhere.

The Commune kept the bourgeois form of elections, but the victorious workers did not simply take over the bourgeois state machine. They smashed it and began to build something brand new: the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

The masses were the real masters of the Commune. Twenty thousand activists attended small club meetings daily to offer criticisms and make suggestions. Elected officials considered all proposals and usually acted on them. Officials who disregarded the masses were subject to immediate recall.

The workers' government disbanded the bourgeois Guard units. It suspended all decrees of the old government. Workers pulled down the Victory Column, symbol of French imperialism. They elected a Hungarian-German communist to their governing body, declaring that the Commune represented workers everywhere.

The workers' government wiped out state support of religion and took over church property. It capped officials' salaries so that none made more than a worker's wage. It took away bosses' rights to fine workers. It took over workshops that had been closed because of the economic depression and turned them over to workers' cooperatives.

This working-class dictatorship was the necessary prerequisite to abolishing the wage-slavery of capitalism. The Commune held power for ten short weeks. It proved for all time that the working class can, must, and will rule society.

Why did the workers lose in 1871?

The French bourgeoisie used tax money taken from the workers' sweat to pay off the German government to release French prisoners of war. In May, after a bloody civil war in the streets, these soldiers re-took Paris for the bosses. The communist movement was quick to draw some lessons from this heroic and historic struggle. Other lessons we only recognized a century later.

- Workers need to smash the bosses' state. But the Commune did not go far enough. It was lenient with counter-revolutionaries and renegades. It allowed the French bourgeoisie to regroup, instead of organizing a Red Army to hunt it down. The bourgeoisie was not lenient at all after it crushed the Commune, murdering 100,000 workers (including children). The Commune was not able to link up with Communes in Lyons, Marseilles, and other cities. The working class dictatorship needs to arm and organize the masses, but it also needs a Red Army.
- The Commune organized workers into political clubs, but not into a communist party. There was plenty of democracy (discussion of policy) but not much centralism (united action). The political form of bourgeois democracy undermined the working-class goals of the Commune.
- The Commune did not move quickly enough to abolish capitalism. Had it expropriated the Bank of France, the French bourgeoisie would have had a much harder time raising a counter-revolutionary army.

The Commune recognized the need for equality among workers and revolutionary cadre. But we can see now that equalizing wages was no substitute for abolishing the wage system altogether.

As we march for communism on May Day this year and every year, the Progressive Labor Party will carry forward the spirit of the Paris Commune.

For more on the Paris Commune and the lessons communists drew from it, read Karl Marx's book, The Civil War In France; Frederick Engels, The Great Lessons of the Paris Commune. ✪

RED EYE ON THE NEWS . . .

Communists led class struggle in deep South

NYT, 3/1 [Jamelle Bouie] — Racism and class exploitation are tied up ….

…In the wake of emancipation, formerly enslaved Blacks established Union Leagues, where they organized for self-defense and ... equality….In secret meetings…freedmen… speaking to frustration over the holdovers of slavery….

…White and Black…prefigured radical politics….

That radicalism was at its strongest within the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers. "Originally an outgrowth of the Western Federation of Miners…, Mine Mill developed a national reputation as a radical left-wing union during the 1930s," the historian Robin Kelley writes in "Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression…." Black workers held leadership positions within the union. Included among them were Communists ….

"Union meetings were held in the woods, in sympathetic Black churches,..." Kelley notes. "Company police used violence and intimidation in an effort to crush Mine Mill…. The largest steel company in the area,... created a company union that weaponized racism and anti-Communism to attract white workers and weaken the Mine Mill.

…The Black workers would struggle ... for racial equality and the emancipation of labor, neither of which could exist without the other….

In the early 1970s…the Public Employees Organizing Committee strove to unionize Birmingham's predominantly Black hospital and nursing home employees…. The Committee…"emphasized cross-racial solidarity" and "placed struggles over the workplace at the center of an expansive freedom agenda."

…The [current] Amazon unionization drive in Bessemer is…combining "class consciousness with race solidarity…."

…The South…is home to a rich history of resistance against the twin forces of race hierarchy and class exploitation;…

Can't pay rent? Wall Street profits

NYT, 3/4 — What happens when 10 million tenants can't make rent?

Investors looking to profit from the pandemic's fallout have referred to this hardship as the "greatest buying opportunity of the century." Sitting on more than $300 billion, they are looking to acquire distressed properties.

The 2008 financial crisis showed ... enormous transfer of wealth and property out of the hands of families ... into the portfolios of Wall Street.

[In]…pre-pandemic days…one in four renters were already devoting half their income to rent ...

Covid-19/racism reflected in death tolls

NYT, 3/9 — While Black and Latino people make up only 13 and 18 percent of the U.S. population,,…they account for more than 50 percent of ... Covid-19 hospitalizations.

In Los Angeles County, deaths among Latino people have increased more than 1,000 percent since November, nearly triple the rate for white residents. Native Americans have been nearly twice as likely as white people to die. …Communities of color have been ravaged … because of the effects of racism….

... racism is behind the massive disparities in Covid-19 infection, death and vaccination.

Deadly legacy of Vietnam gravely sickens U.S. workers

NYT, 2/9 — Veterans exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War may be more likely to develop dementia than their unexposed comrades.

Agent Orange is an herbicide that the United States military used during the war to defoliate Vietnam's dense jungles in order to deprive North Vietnamese soldiers of a place to hide and to destroy crops. Exposure has been associated with Parkinson's disease, some cancers, hypertension and ...

….Those exposed to the herbicide were almost twice as likely to develop dementia.

$16,752 electric bill = Texas bosses callously profit from crisis

NYT, 2/21 — As millions of Texans shivered in dark, cold homes…while a winter storm devastated the state's power grid,…those who could still summon lights ... felt lucky.

Now many of them are paying a stiff price for it.

"My savings is gone," said Scott Willoughby, a 63-year-old Army veteran who lives on Social Security payments….nearly emptied his savings account ... to pay the $16,752 electric bill ... — 70 times what he usually pays ...— "it's broken me."

Mr. Willoughby is among scores…who have reported sky-rocketing electric bills.

…Many people's homes were cut off from heat….

The steep electric bills ... a result of the state's uniquely unregulated energy market….

Katrina Tanner…had been charged $6,200 this month, more than five times what she had paid in all of 2020…. Ms. Tanner…[now has just $200 left….

William Hogan,…the architect of the Texas energy market design, said…that the high prices reflected the market performing as it was designed.

ART FOR ANTIRACISTS

LANGSTON HUGHES AND THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

(This is the final part of our three-part series. For the previous parts, see www.plp.org)

Langston Hughes, a major 20th-century literary figure, moved significantly to the left in the mid-1930s—as a poet, playwright, and journalist. At a time when imperialist fascism in Italy and Germany brought on the invasion of Ethiopia (1935-37) the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), and eventually World War II (1939-1945), Hughes became one of the world's leading communist and antiracist voices.

In 1933, after more than a year in the Soviet Union, Hughes returned to California and probably his favorite subject: the U.S. working class. He joined a group of writers and artists active in the local CPUSA-affiliated John Reed Club, named after the communist journalist and activist who covered the Bolsheviks' October Revolution in 1917. Still involved in protests to free the Scottsboro Eight (see CHALLENGE, 3/17), he composed "One More 'S' in the USA," a song for a CP fund-raiser for the Scottsboro victims of the capitalists' criminal injustice system. He also co-wrote a play, never produced, called "Blood on the Fields," about a strike by agricultural workers in the San Joaquin Valley.

Beyond his local activities, Hughes joined national organizations to foster multiracial unity by bringing leading Black writers and intellectuals into dialogue and actions with communists. He became president of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, which evolved into the National Negro Congress and involved such famous cultural figures as Richard Wright, Paul Robeson, and Elizabeth Catlett. Though Hughes always worked collectively, he was singled out for racist criticism and red-baiting, not to mention surveillance by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

In the mid-1930s, Hughes wrote and produced plays about Black working-class life and the importance of multiracial unity, such as *When the Jack Hollers*. But the invasion of Ethiopia by Mussolini in 1935—a pure act of racist aggression—turned the attention of Black workers to worldwide racism and fascism, the phase of capitalism when the bosses discard their charade of liberal democracy (see Glossary, p. 6). Black newspapers like the *Amsterdam News* reported weekly on Ethiopia.

Then, in 1936, came the Spanish Civil War, when General Francisco Franco and his armies rebelled against the leftist Popular Front government, supported by communists, socialists, and anarchists. Nazi Germany and fascist Italy sent arms and planes to help Franco. The Spanish "Republican" government appealed to the U.S., France, and Great Britain for aid. But not surprisingly, the capitalist bosses wanted nothing to do with it. By contrast, the Soviet Union sent aid and established International Brigades for workers of all nations to join. Thousands of workers from the U.S., Black and white, many of them communists, enlisted in the famous Abraham Lincoln Brigade. Within the U.S., communists raised funds for the war effort. Hughes helped organize the American Writers and Artists Ambulance Corps, which bought an ambulance for the bloody campaign.

The International Workers Order, another communist-organized organization, sent Hughes on a 12-city tour to raise more aid for the anti-fascists in Spain. The IWO published a *A New Song*, a booklet of 17 political poems by Hughes, including "Let America Be America Again," "Justice," "Chant for Tom Mooney," "Chant for May Day," "Ballads of Lenin," and "Open Letter to the South" [see CHALLENGE, 3/17). In "Song of Spain," Hughes moves from images of bullfights and flamenco guitarists to the grim realities of war:

A bombing plane
The song of Spain.
Bullets like rain's
The song of Spain.
Poison gas is Spain.
A knife in the back
And its terror and pain is Spain.
…
The people are Spain
The people beneath that bombing plane….
…
Workers, make no bombs again!
Workers, mine no gold again!
Workers, lift no hand again
To build up profits for the rape of Spain!
Workers, see yourselves as Spain!
…
I must drive the bombers out of Spain!
I must drive the bombers out of the world!
I must take the world for my own again—
A workers' world
Is the song of Spain.

Hughes subsequently went to Spain himself to send back wartime dispatches to the *Baltimore Afro-American* and other Black news agencies. En route he stopped in Paris to deliver a rousing speech, "Too Much of Race," to the International Writers Congress. It included these communist ideas: "We represent the end of race. And the Fascists know that when there is no more race, there will be no more capitalism, and no more war, and no more money for the munition makers, because the workers of the world will have triumphed" (Brian Dolinar, The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation, p. 90). Hughes understood that capitalism absolutely requires racism to exploit and divide the working class.

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In July 1937, Hughes crossed over the French Pryenees into northern Spain and then to Barcelona and Valencia. By August he was in Madrid, where he joined CPUSA members in the Lincoln Brigade and interviewed Black volunteers for his dispatches. When he traveled outside the city, communists helped arrange his tours. During his four months in Madrid, Hughes circulated among other writers hunkered down in the besieged city, including Ernest Hemingway, Malcolm Cowley, and Lillian Hellman. The great singer and communist Paul Robeson also came to give concerts for the anti-fascist cause.

As historian Brian Dolinar has observed, "Hughes explained to black readers how the fight against fascism was connected to the fight against racism at home" (Dolinar, p. 87). His essays "Laughter in Madrid," (published in *The Nation*, January 29, 1938), voiced admiration for workers' courage and their resistance to fascist rule: "Yes, people still laugh in Madrid. In this astonishing city of bravery and death, where the houses run right up to the trenches and some of the street-car lines stop only at the barricades, people still laugh, children play in the streets. . . . Madrid, dressed in bravery and laughter; knowing death and the sound of guns by day and night, but resolved to live, not die!"

Back in the U.S., Hughes advocated for the Double V campaign, the connected struggles against racism in the U.S. and fascism in Europe.

In his journalism, poetry, plays, and essays, Hughes brilliantly conveyed the experiences of ordinary workers who strived to unite as a force for history. Progressive Labor Party can carry on Hughes' legacy when we lead the way toward multiracial unity and communist revolution. ✪

(Biographical information is drawn from Arnold Rampersad, The Life of Langston Hughes, 2 vols. 2nd edition, New York: Oxford, 2002; and Brian Dolinar, The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation, Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012.)

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